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SOME THOUGHTS UPON LIFE AND ART.

BY MARY PARMELE.

ONE must have lived a half century to realize what a different world this is from the one our fathers knew. They were greater than their stage, but to-day one must be conspicuous indeed to rise above the brilliant *mise-en-scène*. Still it seems an age of preparation, rather than of achievement. There is a shifting of scenes, as if preparing for a new act in the earth drama. The old is being cast off and new put on by upheaval instead of by the slower processes of nature. As is natural, the older generation does not like it. The quick movement jars upon the sense, the departure from cherished beliefs shocks the sensibilities, and with such power as they can they resist the impertinent innovations of a new age. How can a "new theology" compensate for the passing away of the old? Can the "music of the future" be expected to replace the sweet, the sacred music of the past? And is it strange that Japanese bric-a-brac and fashionable decorative extravagances are a dreary offence to those whose ideals were formed by the dignified schools which now live only in the history of art?

It is the old story of growth. All simple and natural enough until you call it by that dangerous name Evolution. It is the lower life making room for the higher, the living principle within expanding; resisted by the conservative force from without. There is not a blade of grass that pushes its way through the soil, not a bud that opens, that does not illustrate the same struggle of opposing forces, each in its way essential; for were it all unresisted energy from within, who can describe the chaos or only conservatism from without?—what petrefaction.

So the nicely balanced powers work on always higher and higher, and, although with apparent lapses, always approaching nearer to a divine ideal. Through the imperfections of the present time, progress unfolding is obvious everywhere. The beliefs, the tastes, and, better yet, the heart, never before gave the world promise and appearance of such a race of men. A new era has dawned—love, not hate is the moving force. Men are intent upon diminishing, not increasing the sorrows of the race; benevolence has usurped the place of cruelty, and a divine tenderness and pity throws its *Aegis* even over the brute creation; it savours of Heaven, and is as if there had been a little rift in the curtain which had let in some of the airs from that blest abode. And this is growth, this is unfolding. He must be a dull observer indeed who cannot see that humanity has ascended to a higher place, not so much by virtue of what it has done, as by what it is.

Are these new conditions going to be favorable to art? is a question which occurs to some. There has been an impression that pestilential vapors and foul impurities were needed for this rare plant. The Oriental, steeped in moral degradation, but with intuitive perception of grace

of line and harmony of color, has been contrasted with the Scot—noble, true, generous—but whose highest art achievement has been the combining of ugly checkered squares. We have been reminded that great art periods have been periods also of deepest social corruption, until we had come to believe there existed a subtle relation between art and human wickedness—that the one reached its greatest heights only when the other touched the lowest depths. Let who will believe that this divine gift to man draws its highest inspiration from the lurid fires of hell—we cannot. We believe the future holds the most exalted form of this, as of all other results of man's endeavor.

The art energy which has manifested itself in the last decade began as a fashion, but seems likely to survive as a permanent influence in the future. It is peculiar in its character. The art of the past was a *cult*, this is a pursuit. Excellence, not greatness, is the modest goal. Where one exalted genius used to interpret, thousands now contribute each a little to swell the tidal

drawing the useful up into the realm of the beautiful. Converting idle loungers in picture galleries into workers, and leavening the mass with artistic feeling; the crudities of taste and color of only ten years ago could not be endured now.

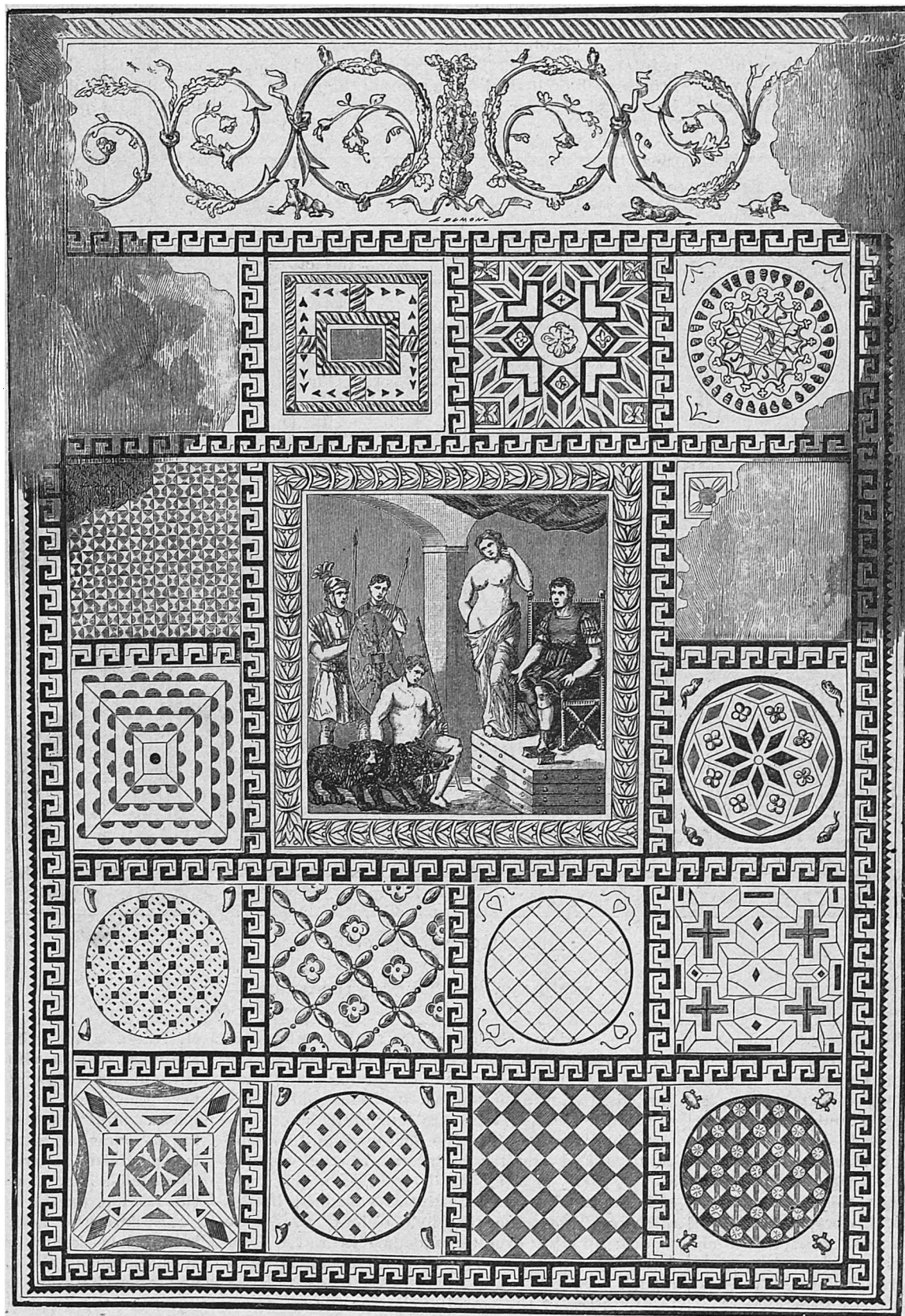
These periods of enthusiasm are epochs, and the vagaries and eccentricities which have developed into schools, are only various phases of art growth. They are the joints upon the stem where the redundant life accumulates, and having taken up new elements, departs at a tangent and forms the branch. Pre-Raphaelism was such a departure—no doubt a necessary and healthful one. Realism, unlovely in itself, was a check upon a too long regnant idealism. Now the dismal impressionist is a rebuke to a slavish imitation, and it may be that even the abnormal craving for Japanese diet may serve some mysterious purpose in the strange economy of art growth.

Assuredly a return to Medieval tastes is perfectly in harmony with a law which has lately manifested itself simultaneously in religion, in literature, in music, in art, and in dress. The revival of ritualistic practices, of Gregorian music, of ceramic art, of Illuminated text, of stained glass after antique methods; indeed this honey-combing of our civilization with medievalism, is only the assertion of a well-known law of growth, a tendency of life to go back and renew itself from the parent stock. Were it not for these returns, and thus keeping close to the original ideal, chaos not cosmos would be the result; but this checking of speed, this going back and gathering up what is vital, only to rush with new vigor into the unknown, is not an accident or meaningless freak of fashion; it is the eternal ebb and flow—the sounding of the everlasting rhythm which underlies all apparent discords and disorder.

PAINTING ON PEBBLES.

THE summer visit to the seaside may be turned by amateurs to good account in providing themselves with material on which to spend after effort for decorative purposes, in the pebbles scattered on the beach, and ordinarily taken up only to be thrown away, unless some peculiarly beautiful ones attracted attention. In any leading resort a lapidary is to be met with who will cut the pebbles at the front of their broadest diameter, polishing the face. This then is the surface to the painting of which we invite the attention of amateurs. The forms to be preferred are oval. Any small apertures may be filled with a mixture of parchment size and

whiting. The surface, leaving a band of stone as a margin for the painting, may be coated with Chinese white if water colors are to be used, or flake white if painting is to be in oil colors. The lines may be traced with a lead pencil. For water colors the illuminating colors are the best. The work does not require much shading and stippling. When the work is dry apply a coat of mastic varnish, and rub it down with a silk handkerchief or the palm of the hand; then apply a second coat, rubbing it over with mutton fat, to be afterwards removed. In painting the pebbles they may be half imbedded in a box of sand.



ANTIQUE MOSAIC FOUND AT NÎMES. FROM "L'ILLUSTRATION."

wave of beauty. The result is that ugly, in-artistic homes have been transformed into beautiful ones. We gaze upon walls that are poems, and eat from dishes that would grace art collections; but better than this, a vast amount of unemployed energy has found congenial and profitable occupation, and lives that were empty and aimless are happy.

It is true that when one thinks of the great canvases of the past, of the themes which used to employ the brush and the chisel, this passionate pursuit of the beautiful *in petto* seems like the day of small things, but it is not so. It is